

ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOL LOCAL GOVERNMENT CURRICULA

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Title: Out and About Locally

Theme: Citizen Responsibility and Participation at the Local Level

GLCE:

2- C1.0.1 Explain why people form governments.

2- C5.0.3 Design and participate in community improvement projects that help or inform others.

2- P4.2.2 Participate in projects to help or inform others

Materials: *Roxaboxen* by Alice McLerran
Downloads 1-7
Poster Board
Markers
Overhead
Computer Access (optional)

Methodological Procedures:

Day 1: Ask the question “What is a community?” Write down all reasonable responses on the overhead (download #1).

A community is a place where people live and work together. Have students complete a KWL (download #2) about communities beginning with what they “know” about communities and what they “wonder” about them. Have students pair up and share what they “know” and “wonder.”

Next share the story of *Roxaboxen* by Alice McLerran twice with your students. The first time have them simply listen and enjoy the story about a make-believe community created by children. During the second reading, have students jot down some things that they were able to “learn” about communities from the story on their KWL. Have students share what they’ve learned with the entire class. You may want to have a copy of the KWL on an overhead for this sharing activity.

Day 2: Apply what students have learned about communities from Day 1 to the establishment of a classroom community. Remind students that *a community is a place where people live and work together.* A classroom community is a place where we live and work together 5 days a week during the school year. Review what made the community of Roxaboxen a community. Ask your class, “What do we need to establish in order for our classroom community to function and grow in a positive way?”

- A community needs caring *citizens* (people living/working there).
- A community needs a *location* (where it can be found).

- A community needs a *government* (a group of citizens that make the rules for the community and insures that they are followed).
- A community needs *resources* (something that can be used for something else).
- A community needs *customs* (ways of doing things).
- A community needs *history* (what has happened in the past).

Go over the above list of community needs (download #3) on the overhead. Hopefully they will realize that they are the citizens of our classroom community, they have a location, they have resources, they have customs, and they have history. What they need yet to establish is a classroom government.

1. Identify the teacher as the mayor or city/classroom manager (mayors are elected and city managers are hired).
2. Establish districts (groups of 4-6 students) and have them elect a councilman/woman within each group.
3. Have each district develop 4 rules/laws for our classroom to be presented at a city/classroom council meeting.
4. Have the councilmen/women share their groups' ideas with the council.
5. Once the ideas are shared, the councilmen/women vote on the rules/laws to be adopted. A simple majority rules.
6. Create a classroom Bill of Rights to display the adopted rules/laws on a poster (download #4):

We the students/citizens of this classroom have adopted the following rules/laws to ensure that our classroom community is a place where all students/citizens can work, grow, and learn (list rules/laws and have all students/citizens and the teacher/mayor/city manager sign the poster).

Day 3: Begin by reviewing how the students showed responsibility and participated in establishing their classroom community yesterday (participated in government; elected officials, voted on rules/laws). Ask students why we went to the trouble of establishing our classroom community and review the important parts of our classroom community by discussing the “who,” “what,” “where,” “when,” and “why” (5 Ws) on the overhead (download #5).

Now let's apply this knowledge to our local community. Pass out the “Out and About Locally” booklets (download #6). Have students get back into their district groups and on the left side of each page, identify the “5 Ws” and the “How” of our local community. On the right, identify your students/citizens' place in it.

Who	What	Where	When	Why	How
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Mayor, City Manager, Township Officers, Policemen, Firemen County Clerks, Volunteers, Citizens Judges	Help Each Other, Volunteer, Communicate, Do Community Service, Write Letters, Vote (Think Safety, Health, Common Good)	Township, City, or Village, County, State, Country, Continent, etc.	Next Two Weeks, A Month, A Year, In November (these are all good example).	Why Should We Do This? Students Should Establish Their Purpose For Citizen Participation and Responsibility Here.	Students Should Come Up With A Plan For Doing What They've Decided To Do.
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Put up 6 posters around the room (who, what, where, when, why, and how). Give each group/district a different color marker and assign them a specific poster at which to start. Rotate the groups around the room and have them write down their thoughts.

Quickly go over the “Who,” “Where,” and “When” posters. Spend more time on the “What,” “Why,” and “How.” Decide on one or two issues from the “What” poster that the class would like to pursue as a way to show citizen responsibility and participation. Some possible examples:

- Pooper-Scooper Project
- Skateboard Park
- School Safety
- Rename a Street/Park/Trail/School
- Recycling
- Litter Pick-up
- Voter Turnout
- School Schedule (year-around, holidays)
- School Uniforms/Dress Code
- Senior Citizen Support
- Volunteer
- Other Community Service

Discuss “Why” the class would want to pursue this problem/issue and establish “How” we will go about accomplishing it.

Day 4: “Take Action Day.” Today is the day when students should venture “Out and About” into their local communities and do something for the common good of that community. Depending on the time of year this unit is taught, they could pass out “Vote” stickers to encourage higher voter turnout in the fall, pick up litter around the school in the spring, start a better school recycling program in the winter, write letters about the naming of a local park prior to summer, etc. This activity will allow students to participate in their local community/government and act like responsible citizens.

Day 5: Have students reflect on their citizen participation this past week (download #7). They should be able to explain how you established a classroom government and the different roles of the people that live and work there. They should also be able to list a number of ways that they can participate and demonstrate citizen responsibility.

Author's Notes:

Day 1 ~ This unit introduces students to the power of citizen participation and responsibility. The story *Roxaboxen* is a great introduction to this study and one that kids can relate to.

Day 2 ~ Feel free to adapt the vocabulary when establishing your classroom government (mayor vs. city manager). There may be terminology that better suits your needs and therefore make it easier to apply to local government later.

Day 3 ~ Having each group use a different colored marker while traveling around the room makes it easier to connect each group's responses from poster to poster.

Day 4 ~ Depending on the issue/problem at hand, students may participate or show responsibility either on or off your school's campus.

Day 5 ~ Although this unit is meant to introduce your students to citizen participation and responsibility, the hope is that the ideas generated are a catalyst for future involvement in the local government and community. If students are motivated, they could easily make citizen participation and responsibility a lifestyle for the rest of school year (and future).

Assessment Strategies: Teachers should consider grading both the KWL and the 5 Ws booklet. A reflective self assessment can be given at the end of the unit.

Enrichment Suggestions/Resources: You may want to consider using the following two resources by Barbara A. Lewis for additional enrichment activities. They are great for students who feel empowered by this unit and want to do more for their local communities and world.

1. Kids with Courage: True Stories about Young Children Making a Difference
2. The Kid's Guide to Social Action

For additional elementary lessons that go beyond the above content standards in this unit, access the MHCC website at:

<http://www.civicscommission.com/resources/curricula/index.html>.

There you can find two additional units that have been written with public discourse, inquiry, and decision making in mind.

Available Downloads:

- Download #1 - Community Web
- Download #2 - Community KWL
- Download #3 - Community Needs

- Download #4 - Bill of Rights
- Download #5 - 5 Ws of Community
- Download #6 - Out and About Locally Booklet
- Download #7 - Reflective Self Assessment

Suggested Websites:

- Kids Around Town @ <http://palwv.org/kat/>
- Ben's Guide to Government @ <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/>
- Student Voices @ <http://student-voices.org/>
- Service Learning Network @ http://www.crf-usa.org/network/network11_1/net11_1_home.html
- Michigan House Civics Commission @ <http://www.civicscommission.com/index.html>
- The Civics Institute @ <http://www.civicsinstitute.org/initiatives/MHCC.html>